

3 TROOP ROYAL MARINE ENGINEER COMMANDO.

THIS is probably the last time that august name will appear in print so we may as well spread ourselves a bit—and anyway the ED said “send in lashings”. Therefore a saga is indicated.

Gradually we are disintegrating; but this is something new and has a hollow ring—the echoes of where our two-toed finger-prints have sounded. Most of the old familiar faces have gone and perhaps its not to be long before all that is left of us will be a weather bleached blue notice board with a white “49” painted on it and a thin wispy voice of a bare-faced boy coming out of space and saying “Engrs present Sah” but definitely the notice board. Oh yes; possibly also a rusted earth auger and a square box and a ghost of “a man to superintend”.

But we have our memories. Few old lags are left who can recall the drab grey afternoon in October 1943 when in greasy, Bailey - bridge - stained Battle-dress 3 Sec. 1 (RM) Engr. Commando tumble out of a train and presenting themselves at 44 Old Dover Road, Canterbury to join HQ 3 S.S. Bde. Of the Brigadiers comments on my cap. A frantic and muddling mobilising as stores mysteriously arrived from Ordinance and from our Parent Unit, 15 cwts flying across the length and breadth of the United Kingdom panic stricken, and panic stations for embarkation leave, the cold chill awakening to the icy drizzle at Gourock Docks and the cold wet queues

stumbling into the depths of a ship called “Ranchi”.

A bomb from the blue Mediterranean skies and—Alex, and for 7 weeks we go to town. When we are old and grey we’ll still be saying as we dangle our grandchildren on our knees. “When I was in Alex”. And so to Poona and everybody writes home “I can’t tell you where I am but by Gad Sir! when I was in.....”

We open our stores boxes and begin to find that there are quite a number of “just those things”, we have a blacksmith and tool kit but no forge, the chippy kits have no planes or chisels, the painters kit has no brushes except a lavatory brush. But we begin our long, long list of signs to be painted, which no one can see ending before Gabriel gets hotter than Harry James.

Alethangyaw (yes, we were thah) and humping explosives; Silchar and the “Dispute as to whether the Combined Ops Sign should go on the topside or the underside of the lid”. The other half of us meanwhile rotted in that white man’s grave, Cocanada, made more signs, got bigger and better boxes and put our stores in them, made blowing up exercises on the beach and got prickly heat.

Trincomalee and a lot more signs—bigger and better than ever (the “direction post” was the real effort, especially when all the arrows were carefully pointed the wrong way); galley building and concreting and

electric lighting (sudden cries in the dark as the lights failed, "Hawdon",

"Sir",

"Whats happened to the lights?"

"Cpl. Murphy, whats happened to the lights?"

"Warrener those lights have gone out again."

"Well, Allen's duty generator man."

"Oh, he's just gone out in the jeep" . . .)

At Trinco, suddenly the other half of the Troop arrived from the U.K. and many were the lines shot about the second front and LOOGU and frogmen and the hell of the beaches, and of the green hell of Londa Jungle. So we became a Troop, sat up and took notice. Remember that big opposed landing exercise in the lagoon? More muck than that flying, and the new flame throwers, the old Bangalores and rebuilding the battle field twice a day, we did it 26 times for you lucky Com-mando Chaps.

Our motto up to now has been "You can do anything with bamboo except make it float". Attendant was the vision of a "Sapper Sampan" and a "grass bolster". A few weeks at Teknaf brought out the full usefulness of the earthauger. We used it to bore wells for the Bde—we filled them from a gash water truck at dead of night.

The arrival of "the noo Depity and Razabil"; body-guards and patrols with him (very nerve-racking—even more than with "Baby Dumpling"; Lt. Coggor, who had collected

an MC in France) and the epic of Smith's Bridge or Wood-house's wonder "Body".

Hockings—"I've found a lovely tree for the bridge Sir, just over there." Three miles away we find a colossal tree ten feet in diameter and a hundred feet high, bang in the middle of a unit bivvy.

"Oh blow it down sir" he says. Well, the guns got across and the bridge didn't fall down.

Then the birth of the "Wood-peckers Club" and the new motto "Tactum Bendus". The new Deputy Comd. inspects our bunker we'd been dripping about when clearing paddy-bunds to make a parade ground—we'd all got lofty and didn't think it was "Engineer Work"—He crawled inside, felt the cool air and smelt the new wood, crept out and with a leer said "Build me a house like this; plans in by 5 o'clock".

And so we begun the famous "Log Cabin" with its living room; 2 beds, bath, box, central heating, tel. c. (no h.); two minutes from the lines. We wonder how many Burmese families are now living in the Sahib's burra basha. And all scrounged; so was every bit of the "Theatre Royal"; we were really proud of that; with the trees behind it and the night sky and the full tropic moon; Hollywood Bowl had nothing on it at all. Particularly with "Yvette".

Then the drums began beating again, and one fine morning we shoved off for Akyab.

It turned out to be an exercise, but we were proud of the beach we made and of landing two

Brigades. A few days later we loaded the Bde flights of craft and sailed for Myebon.

We shant forget that landing, or the mines; sunset before, Lt. Cogger had a duffy with some Japs on the Island; "Hawdon's Causeway" was born (with much sweat and toil) from the rocks of Easy Beach; the mines came up and the road went through; the Kantha Chaung was crossed with a rolypoly causeway.

A Days rest and off to Kangaw. Fox Beach emerged from the mud; we merged into same; laid Jap-traps on Pinner, dug ammo store pits (very quickly dug, very slowly filled with ammo) made a road and stretcher bearer track and foot-bridge; and kissed the deck of the L.C.T. that took us out.

Back to mother India. We'd collected a lot of experience for the next do. Sgt. Pirie got his well deserved MM., Cpl. Newbert his Mention in Despatches; I.† Cogger left for the Fleet. Capt. Hanshall rejoined "the old 49" from 44 Cdo; some of the old hands left us we took more shape; Poona, Ahmednagar. Belgaum, Kharakvasla; new

special stores, new organisations, flamethrower and assault demolition detachments went to and trained with Commandos; set for Penang; we met "Belsen"; then some silly fellow ended the war; Hong Kong and at last we are on "China Station".

A new Engr racket emerged—sea time. Jap suicide boats as a sideline and M.L. "Kangaw" the apple of our eye.

Now slowly the troop is disintegrating. In ones and twos they leave. Capt. Woodhouse, Ted Parsons, Jock Robertson, "Jacko" Arthur Bulford the dripper, Alex Brown, Shortv and Juddud, Harry Hanslip the legendary figure of Eng Coy since the year dot, Mumford, Spalding, Larry Deer, John Robson, Jock Kirkpatrick, Bud Selfe, Capt. Henshall, C.S.M. "Body" "Foot" "Voice" Hockings, and all, whistled away. Well, good luck to them all.

And so we say farewell. But well meet again. There's still the 49 Club and we hope when it gets going that we'll meet again every year and once more say "Hullo".